# Records Management Basics for New Employees

## DEFINITIONS

### What is a record?
⌨ www.epa.gov/records/whatis/

Recorded information, in any format, that is:
- created in the course of business,
- received for action, or
- needed to document EPA activities.

### What is a records schedule?
⌨ www.epa.gov/records/policy/schedule/

A document that describes a group of records, and mandates:
- how long the records are kept (retention), and
- what happens to them at the end of that time period (disposition).

### What is a recordkeeping system?
⌨ www.epa.gov/records/faqs/rks.htm

A system, paper-based or electronic, that:
- collects, organizes and categorizes records, and
- facilitates their preservation, retrieval, use and disposition.

### What is a file plan?
⌨ www.epa.gov/records/tools/toolkits/filecode/

A document that lists the records in your office, and describes:
- how they are organized (file structure), and
- how they are maintained (procedures).

### For more information

Contact the Records Help Desk
Phone: 202-566-1494
E-mail: records@epa.gov
Web: http://intranet.epa.gov/records

Agency Records Officer:
John Ellis, 202-566-1643
ellis.john@epa.gov

Headquarters Records Officer:
Tammy Boulware, 202-566-1665
boulware.tammy@epa.gov

Records Liaison Officers:
http://intranet.epa.gov/records/contact.htm

RM Training for E-mail in ECMS
http://intranet.epa.gov/ecms/training/

## RECORDS LIFECYCLE

create/receive → capture → close → retire* → transfer/destroy

|——— active ———|——— inactive ———|
* optional
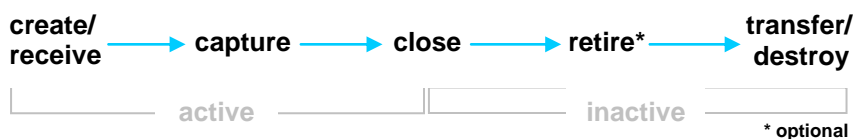
## HOW TO IDENTIFY RECORDS

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, you may have a **record**:

- Was it created in the course of business?
  *e.g., correspondence, agreements, studies*

- Was it received for action?
  *e.g., FOIA requests, controlled correspondence*

- Does it document EPA activities and actions?
  *e.g., calendars, meeting minutes, project reports*

- Is it mandated by statute or regulation?
  *e.g., administrative records, dockets*

- Does it support financial obligations or legal claims?
  *e.g., grants, contracts, litigation case files*

- Does it communicate EPA requirements?
  *e.g., guidance documents, policies, procedures*

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, you may have a **non-record**:

- Is it reference material?
  *e.g., vendor catalogs, phone books, technical journals*

- Is it a convenience copy?
  *e.g., duplicate copies of correspondence or directives*

- Is it a stock copy?
  *e.g., EPA publications or forms*

- Is it a draft or working paper?
  *e.g., draft with no substantive comments, rough notes, calculations*

\* Careful: some drafts are needed to support the decision trail or are required by a records schedule.

If you answer "yes" to this question, you may have a **personal paper**:

- Is it only related to your own affairs?
  *e.g., soccer schedule, PTA roster*

\* Careful: personal planners and calendars may actually be records if they document your activities for EPA.

**What is a record?**  If you answer yes to any of the following questions, you may have a record:
- Was it created in the course of business?
- Was it received for action?
- Does it document EPA activities and actions?
- Is it mandated by statute or regulation?
- Does it support financial obligations or legal claims?
- Does it communicate EPA requirements?

**What are EPA employee's responsibilities regarding records?**
Every person who works for the Agency is responsible for Agency records.
If you create a document, enter information into a database, file a document in a folder, answer an inquiry from the public, respond to a FOIA request, or do anything else that documents your activities for EPA, you are a records custodian. You are responsible for ensuring the safety, timely availability, and proper retention and/or transfer of information in your custody.
All EPA employees are responsible for:
- Creating and managing the records necessary to document the Agency's official activities and actions, including those records generated by EPA contractors and grantees, in accordance with EPA recordkeeping requirements.
- Destroying records only in accordance with approved records schedules and never removing records from EPA without authorization.
- Filing records for safe storage and efficient retrieval and maintaining personal papers and nonrecord materials separately from official EPA records.

**Can e-mail be a record?**
You should treat e-mail messages the same way you treat paper correspondence. An e-mail message is a record if it documents the EPA mission or provides evidence of an EPA business transaction and if you or anyone else would need to retrieve the message to find out what had been done or to use it in other official actions.

**NOTE**: EPA staff should not use any outside e-mail account to conduct official Agency business.  If there is an emergency situation requiring the use of an outside e-mail account, it is the individual's responsibility to ensure all Agency records are captured and managed in an approved recordkeeping system.

**What is a records schedule?**
A document that describes a group of records, and mandates:
- how long the records are kept (retention), and
- what happens to them at the end of that time period (disposition).

**What is a recordkeeping system?**
A system, paper-based or electronic, that:
- collects, organizes and categorizes records, and
- facilitates their preservation, retrieval, use and disposition.

**What is a file plan?**
A document that lists the records in your office, and describes:
- how they are organized (file structure), and
- how they are maintained (procedures).

**For more information contact:**
Your Program's Records Liaison Officer (RLO): http://www.epa.gov/records/people/hq.htm
The National Records Management Program at http://intranet.epa.gov/records/; NRMP Help Desk at 202 566-1494 or email records@epa.gov